The

Non-Subscribing Presbyterian

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Notes of the Month.

With the month of August we enter upon the fourth year of the greatest war in history. Few of us thought on August 4th, 1914, when war was declared against Germany, that a war of such magnitude would still be proceeding after a period of three years. Even though Lord Kitchener, as we learned soon after the beginning of hostilities, was preparing for a three years' war, we thought that such prescience was surely fixing the extreme limit of time. Unfortunately, however, it has proved to be otherwise, and we have still to bear our burden of suffering and sacrifice. How heavy that has been many of us know only too well. There are few homes into which sorrow and bereavement have not entered. The members of other homes, if more fortunate in that respect, have lived days of anxiety and acute fear. To contemplate the continuance of such a period of tension is almost intolerable, and yet if the sacrifices already made are not to be unavailing, we have to go forward until a satisfactory and stable peace is secured. To do that we need to maintain an unshaken faith in the righteousness of our cause, and not to let go of our conviction that civilisation itself and the hope of a better future for mankind are dependent upon our fidelity to purpose and our power of resolute endurance. "In due season we shall reap if we faint not."

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The most disturbing factor at the present time is the condition of the Russian Army. A little time ago we were being roused to enthusiasm by a renewed, and for a time very successful, offensive in Galicia. All too soon, however, there came news of insubordination amongst the Russian soldiers, followed by indications of wholesale desertions. In the face of a resolute enemy, ready to take advantage of indecision and half-heartedness, nothing could be worse, and consequently it is almost impossible to over-estimate the seriousness of the situation in Galicia. That the efforts of M. Kerensky, the new Russian Prime Minister, may make for a radical improvement is our fervent hope. All that strenuous endeavour and iron resolution can do he seems fitted to do, and if he can bring back unity of control and close cohesion into the higher command, while at the same time infusing discipline and doggedness into the ranks, much good may still result. In the meantime the Western Allied forces must make their presence increasingly felt. It is not

too much to hope that there, at least, another successful offensive may be confidently awaited.

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The death of Mr. Francis Dalzell Finlay, which took place in London on July 6th, will recall to memory the services he rendered to the North of Ireland in general, and to our own religious community in particular. Succeeding to the proprietorship of the "Northern Whig" on the death of his father, in 1857—the latter being the founder of that newspaper—he was, like his father, an ardent advocate of religious and civil liberty, and a consistent member of our Non-Subscribing body. Mr. Francis Finlay, senior, had earlier rendered great services, especially at the time of our endeavours to secure legal security for our Church properties. When in 1844 the Royal Assent was given to the Dissenters' Chapels Act, not the least credit was due to the fearless and unceasing advocacy of that measure in the columns of newspapers like the "Northern Whig." It was because of this fact that the First Congregation, Belfast, in the year 1844, presented to the editor of the "Northern Whig" (Mr. Simms) a salver and tea service, and to the proprietor (Mr. Finlay) a salver and dinner service. As long as the above-named newspaper was under the control of these gentlemen our cause was assured of a fair representation and a full hearing. That the same cannot be said to-day is largely due to the fact that other influences have become paramount. Since 1875 the newspaper has been the property of a limited company, Mr. Finlay's interest being only small as compared with the influence he exercised in the days of his proprietorship. His residence in London for the last forty years naturally also lessened his influence here, although it did not extinguish his interest in North of Ireland concerns. For many of the philanthropic activities he helped to inaugurate still appealed to his generous instincts. He was a pioneer of technical education in Belfast, being identified with the Exhibition held in the seventies, which culminated in the foundation of the Belfast Working Men's Institute. Such a man deserved well of the city in which he earlier laboured so strenuously and unselfishly. His recent death at a ripe old age should therefore make us mindful how much we were indebted to him as a religious community—that community of which he remained a devoted member until his life's end.

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In his recent publication, "The Lady Next Door" (Hodder & Stoughton, London), Mr. Harold Begbie makes a terrific onslaught on the religious and moral life of Belfast. He says—"If Belfast did not advertise itself as the most religious city in Ireland, I should refrain from making this charge against it. . . . But my charge is that the religion of Belfast, as a whole, is not the religion founded by Christ. . . . . There is excessive religion in Belfast, excessive religious activity, but I declare that it bears but little resemblance to the religion of Christ. . . . Penetrate to the individual soul, and you will find that the religion is hard, repellant, and Pharisaical. It breeds bigotry, self-esteem, and a violent intolerance. The large and liberal spirit of charity is wanting. Meekness and humility are excluded. Only here and there do you meet a gentle and sweet-minded man who has escaped uninjured from the iron vice of this hideous theology."

* *

"Now, the founder of Christianity foretold that on the Last Day those most sure of heaven, those who in his Name had done great things, would be turned away, and that those welcomed to the kingdom would be surprised and amazed, conscious of no merit, ignorant even that they had rendered service to him. Moreover, in another account of the Great Judgment, he showed that no religious tests would be employed, that no questions would be asked as to what creed a man professed, or in what particular church he had membership, but only what he had done to help the poor and suffering. Since this is the founder's own de-

scription of the great, eternal, and ultimate judgment of terrestrial life, we must conclude—there is no escape from the conclusion—that the life of love and service is the Christian life, and that theology can have no value or weight of any kind whatsoever, save, of course, in so far as it influences men to live the devoted and loving life commanded by the founder."

* *

"By this test the religion of Belfast is weighed and found wanting. . . I have never before visited a city where the beauty of life is so completely destroyed as Belfast. I believe this ugliness is due more than anything else to the false religion which has preached the gospel of money to every class in the community. Everything in Belfast, even the success of Church life, is tested by pounds, shillings, and pence. Nothing is worth while that does not pay. Presbyterian ministers with liberal minds dare not preach sweetness and light . . . because it does not pay."

* * *

Mr. Begbie has singled out Belfast, and made this attack upon its people for his own purpose. Had he not had his own ends to serve, he might have exercised his brilliant gifts as a writer in showing that the religion, not only of Belfast, but of the United Kingdom, "is not the religion founded by Christ."

* *

Many people in Belfast are conscious that the Church of Ireland has in the past made, and does sometimes even now make, arrogant claims to be "the true Church." Many regret that ninety years ago Irish Presbyterianism imitated the Roman and Anglican Churches in giving a certain brand of theology the value and weight which should have been reserved for the religion of Christ. But these are faults not of Belfast alone. They exist in the Established Church of England. They are rampant in the ranks of English Non-Conformity. Belfast and its religion are not all they should be, but other places also fall lamentably short. The advance of the religion of Christ cannot be promoted by placing one city in the pillory and throwing mud at it. We must rather work to make men see that Christianity consists in obedience to the commands and example of Christ himself, and not in assent to doctrine and dogma inherited from ancient councils of the Churches. Creed and confession of faith must go, so that they may make room for the actual teaching of Christ.

A Thought for the Month

"THE RELIGIOUS VALUE OF THE BIBLE."

"Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness."—II. Timothy iii. 16. Revised Version. (Compare Authorised Version.)

"Is it safer for the Individual, and more conducive to the interests of the Church of Christ, in its twofold character of pastoral and militant, to conclude thus:—The Bible is the Word of God, and therefore true, holy, and in all parts unquestionable; —or thus,—The Bible, considered in reference to its declared ends and purposes, is true and holy, and for all who seek truth with humble spirits an unquestionable guide, and therefore it is the Word of God?

"In every generation, and wherever the light of Revelation has shone, men of all ranks, conditions, and states of mind have found in this Volume a correspondent for every movement toward the Better felt in their own hearts. The needy soul has found supply, the feeble a help, the sorrowful a comfort; yea, be the recipiency the least that can consist with moral life, there is an answering grace ready to enter. The Bible has been found a spiritual World,—spiritual, and yet at the same time outward and common to all. You in one place, I in another, all men somewhere or at some time, meet with an assurance that the hopes and fears, the thoughts and yearnings

that proceed from, or tend to, a right spirit in us, are not dreams or fleeting singularities, no voices heard in sleep, or spectres which the eye suffers but not perceives. As if on some dark night a pilgrim, suddenly beholding a bright star moving before him, should stop in fear and perplexity. But lo! traveller after traveller passes by him, and each being questioned whither he is going, makes answer, 'I am following yon guiding star!' The pilgrim quickens his own steps, and presses onward in confidence. More confident still will he be, if by the wayside he should find, here and there, ancient monuments, each with its votive lamp, and on each the name of some former pilgrim, and a record that there he had first seen or begun to follow the benignant Star!

"No otherwise is it with the varied contents of the Sacred Volume. The hungry have found food, the thirsty a living spring, the feeble a staff, and the victorious warfarer songs of welcome and strains of music; and as long as each man asks on account of his wants, and asks what he wants, no man will discover aught amiss or deficient in the vast and many-chambered storehouse"—(S. T. Coleridge: "Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit," Letter VI.)

"IN ANOTHER FORM."

By Rev. John Barron.

"Oh, sir! what became of the body of Jesus in the tomb?" was a question put to one of our ministers by a girl in his class. That particular minister was inclined to the belief expressed by "Robert Elsmere," and which is held by many, that the stories concerning Christ's appearances after death are purely mythological. Unitarians are by no means unanimous on this. Many believe that Christ did appear after his death. One of my earliest recollections is hearing of Unitarians as those who did not believe in the resurrection of Christ, and a very eminent orthodox Presbyterian minister must have had that idea concerning them when, leaning over the pulpit, he said very impressively to his congregation: "My friends, the Unitarians are good people; they love the Lord Jesus just as much as we do. The only difference between them and us is this—they go with us all through the life of Christ until we come to the foot of the hill, and there they stop. We go up the hill with Christ. But, depend upon it, in the long run they get the blood just as much as we do." I am not at all sure as to what such a statement really means, but it is very tolerant. The moral of it is, however, that if such be the case, why go to the trouble of a lot of brain twisting to get our minds fitted into accepted "schemes of salvation," "which, except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved." If the Unitarian will get the blood as much as a Trinitarian, then why bar the door on him as a heretic?

The Unitarian has no dogma concerning the resurrection of Christ any more than he has concerning other alleged incidents in the life of Christ; although quite recently the Bishops of London and of St. Albans announced most emphatically that they would not admit anyone to Holy Orders who did not in the literal meaning of the words, without any mystical interpretation, believe in the resurrection of Christ, as declared in the Fourth Article:—"Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again his body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature."

Reading the accounts of the appearances of Christ after his death, has this Article of Religion the support of Scripture?

According to the accounts, no body was found in the tomb. The wrappings were there. The appearance of Christ to Mary was in a form in which he was clothed in ordinary clothes; it was also a form which was not at that moment to be touched. In his appearance at Emmaus, we are told distinctly that he appeared "in another form." According to Scripture, his

appearance was not in the body in which he had been slain. The form was in the same likeness, but it was a subtle form, which was for the time being material enough to walk by their side, speak to them, to take up bread and to break it. It could come into a room with closed doors, and disappear.

There is abundant testimony on record of the appearance of such forms to people. Alfred Russell Wallace, the co-discoverer of evolution with Charles Darwin, in his auto-biography, speaks of having seen materialised forms in broad daylight. I myself have talked with many people who have told me that they have seen such forms, sometimes unexpectedly, as, for instance, in the case of one of our ministers, who, in his own house, going upstairs, was surprised to see a friend of his, a doctor, in broad daylight, as clearly as ever he saw anybody. He was about to salute him when he vanished. Within a brief space news came from that doctor's house that the doctor had suddenly passed away.

I have no theories to offer as to what such appearances may be, and this is not a journal concerned with psychical research; but, on the evidence of witnesses, whose oath would be unhesitatingly taken in a court of justice on any ordinary matter, there is abundant testimony on record as to the reality of such happenings.

If the body in which Christ appeared after death was a body capable of sudden materialisation and sudden dissolution, then it was, as the Gospel itself clearly states, "another form" of body.

But what became of the body in the tomb? A novel, which in orthodox circles some years ago excited great interest, and was supposed to contain sledge-hammer arguments against Unitarianism—"When it was Dark," by Guy Thorne, had the endorsement on its cover of the Bishop of London and the Rev. R. J. Campbell, the latter of whom soon afterwards developed into the champion of the "New Theology," which he has since repudiated. The plot was based on the fact that the identical sepulchre of Christ had been discovered, and that there was a skeleton in it, presumably his, and this discovery brought about what apparently was a world-wide cataclysm. Anyhow, it emptied the orthodox churches, and for a while the Unitarian Churches had their innings, for there was no getting near them for the crowds that for the time being were under the spell of Unitarianism. Then by some marvellous turn of events it came about that the discovery of the skeleton was a fraud, and the world settled down to its ordinary routine, the terrible darkness of Unitarianism having given way once again to the glorious light of Trinitarianism. Such a mass of rubbish, both in style and argument, to buttress a fundamental dogma of theology, carries with it its own condemnation.

But, what became of the body in the tomb? What becomes of a body blown to atoms by a shell, when it is completely de-atomised—annihilated? What of the force which materialises and de-materialises apparitional bodies?

The Silch religion, which ultimately developed into a warrior and ruling class, founding the empire of the Punjaub, which passed into British control in 1849, was founded by a man of great holiness and purity of life, who tried to reconcile Hindus and Mussulmans in one league of love to God and service to man, Guru Nanak (A.D. 1469–1539). At his funeral the mourners disputed as to whether he should be burned as a Hindu, or should be buried as a Mussulman. One lifted the sheet over the corpse, and the body had disappeared.

He is not the only one in Indian history whose body is said to have been dissolved by some mysterious agency. Even in recent years such an instance is on record. We do not, in these days, know even what matter is, and we are learning continually of hidden forces.

All I would say on the matter is, that the body of Jesus is not the only one that might be said to have suddenly disappeared. In any case it was not there. If the clothes he wore in

the garden were simply materialised, why not also the body in which he appeared to Mary?

The fact remains undisturbed—

"Wherever goodness reigneth
The soul of Christ lives on,
And every Christ-like spirit
Shall rise where he hath gone."

THE CHURCH'S OPPORTUNITY.

By Rev. G. L. Phelps.

If the present is a crisis, not less, but more so, will be the future when peace breaks out. Our rejoicings will scarcely have died away before the gravity of the situation is brought home to us. A great reaction is bound to follow the stress and strain of these present days—the demobilisation of the larger parts of the Army and the Navy, the closing down of innumerable munition works, the presence in our midst of hundreds of thousands of widows and fatherless children, also of hundreds of thousands of maimed men, totally or partially unable to earn their own livelihood, the continued high cost of living, the immense burden of taxation which will still be necessary to pay interest on the war debt, and, taking a broader view, the gigantic task of re-arranging national boundaries, of repairing the waste places, our own imperative need of consolidating our Empire and re-adjusting the machinery of government, and the world-wide problem of the clashing interests of capital and labour—and these great emergencies will have to be faced by nations impoverished in material wealth, and, what is more important, impoverished by the enormous losses of youth, energy, and talent. Would it be possible to imagine circumstances under which lofty spiritual idealism, fervent faith, and an exalted enthusiasm would be more urgently needed? And what of the Christian Churches, to whom these circumstances should present such a glorious opportunity? Alas! we must confess that the Churches have not exercised a commanding influence in the modern world. We had hoped that those who in different lands owed a common loyalty to the Christian religion would have found that loyalty sufficiently strong to avert this catastrophe. When the test came, Christians everywhere found that national loyalty was a more powerful force than the bonds which united them with Christians in hostile countries. If the universal Church had been a living idea in the minds of men, swaying their imaginations and claiming their first allegiance, there could have been no war. I mention this, not that it is any use crying over spilt milk, but because this impotence in the past is a present factor. Then again, since the outbreak of war the Christian Churches have had no distinctive message which, it might have been imagined, should have sounded alike in Germany and England, in Russia, and in Austria and in Italy; but everywhere they have found it easy to reconcile the claims and interests of nationality with the ideals of Christianity. This fact has undoubtedly weakened the power of the Churches in the minds of very many thoughtful people. Time was when Christianity did not trim her sails to every wind that blew, but had courage to be unpopular. What is wanted is not so much a National Mission of Repentance as a Christian resolve on the part of the Churches themselves to repent—that is, to change their whole mind, their whole outlook upon life.

It cannot be too strongly emphasised that it is not Christianity but the Churches that have failed; yet we must work with the instruments that are at hand. Given faith and courage sufficient to undertake the drastic business of self-reformation, the Churches may yet fulfil their mission, and find in the present circumstances the most magnificent opportunity ever offered to man.

It is my firm conviction that this world-war has come about, not because God either would not or could not prevent it, but because it is the natural and logical sequence of the trend of human thought and conduct. The latter half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of this has been remarkable for the progress made in scientific knowledge, and for the wonder-

ful extension of industrialism. THINGS have been in the saddle, and have ridden mankind; there has been an over-emphasis of the material at the expense of the spiritual; the world has been too much with us; in getting and spending we have laid waste our powers. There have, of course, been fine ideals, but they have occupied a secondary place in our lives. In international affairs there has been secret and often unscrupulous diplomacy—the consideration of commercial interests rather than justice and right; in politics, also, the appeal has been to expediency rather than to right.

And among individuals profit and pleasure have been the chief end of man. If there is a God of righteousness, and truth, and love, what but a great catastrophe could follow from the so general disregard of His will? But, horrible as war is, bad as is the atmosphere which it creates, not only in the Army areas but also in the homelands, there are not wanting signs that it has power to teach a better way. In spite of the killing and maiming by land and sea and from the skies; in spite of the sorrow, and anxiety, and privation in so many homes; in spite of the drunkenness, the lust, and the brutality; in spite of the shameful making of profit out of the blood and tears of mankind on the part of professing patriots and Christians, by the mercies of God there are gleams of light in the darkness, there are stars of hope piercing the black night. The longer the war lasts the more widespread is the feeling among those actively engaged in it, and among those at home, expressed in the colloquial words "fed up." War has lost whatever of romance and glory it ever had; it is a grim, ugly, terrible business, and we are all sick of it. This war has cured us of the love of war; yet we must not lay too much stress on this aspect of it. One of the finest souls who have engaged in it, and one who has made the supreme sacrifice—Donald Hankey, the author of "A Student in Arms," was under no delusion in this matter. He said, "It is difficult to believe that the war will heal the nations. I should not be surprised if, when we are old, we see a repetition of this war. I say 'when we are old,' because I have little doubt that it will take most of our lifetime (if we survive the war) for the belligerent nations to recover their strength. But I have little doubt that if, as seems likely, we beat the Hun badly, he will start the moment peace is signed to prepare for his revenge. A depressing thought, isn't it? Also, I doubt if we shall have such a horror of war as lots of people think. The rising generation won't know what we know, and we shall forget much that is bad. When a soldier can write that the brotherhood of the trenches will be 'a wistful radiant memory' NOW, what shall we be writing twenty years hence?" No, the fact that the vast majority of people are "fed up" with war and its attendant evils, does not mean that the Prince of Peace has triumphed, but that a way has been prepared in the wilderness for him. This only constitutes PART of the opportunity offered to the Churches at the present time, though an important part. I feel strongly that we have not, in the past, risen to anything approaching our duty in this matter. The Churches that profess so loudly to stand for the brotherhood of man should insist, in season and out of season, on the obligation laid upon all members of a democratic community to take a deep and intelligent interest in international affairs, and to cultivate to the utmost the spirit of goodwill towards the peoples of foreign lands. The present crisis has surely made it clear to even the dullest, that of nations as well as of individuals it is true, that "we are members one of another." And the Christian Churches should boldly go much further in this direction than this.

It is not sufficient to point out that the old boast of glorious isolation has not only broken down but was unchristian, and that nations that had for generations been regarded with suspicion and hatred are at the present time our honoured allies. Even at the risk of unpopularity we should stand firm to the Christian duty to love our

enemies, which does not mean "slobber over them," or "condone their evil deeds," but certainly does mean "wish them to be our friends." Even in dealing with criminals it is not wise to brand them as evildoers, and to refuse to have any further dealings with them. That attitude only tends to drive them into becoming permanent enemies to society, and renders their reformation well nigh impossible. I do not want to dwell upon, but I DO want to EMPHASISE, this part of our opportunity, therefore I place it first, and now pass on.

The War has brought home to us as nothing else seemed able to do, the supreme importance of the physical and moral wellbeing of even the humblest members of society. Every rejection at the recruiting office, every exemption from service on medical grounds, is a weakness to the nation. We realise now, as never before, that good housing, adequate wages, unadulterated food, purity and sobriety are not matters for each individual or each class to fight out for itself, but are of vital importance to the whole community. In the matter of government, it has been found expedient to have the working classes represented on the War Council, and in many administrative departments. These are practical applications of the brotherhood of man which the Churches have very largely neglected to emphasise, and which have been left to the dear school of experience to teach. Far be it from me to suggest that the dust and din of party politics should be introduced into our Churches. I rejoice that in my own Church there are members of all political parties; but I do maintain that it is our Christian duty to cultivate a broader than party spirit, and to inspire our young people especially to study these grave questions impartially and intelligently, and to carry into them the highest ideals and the loftiest goodwill which our religion demands. For example, one of our most honoured laymen has written and spoken with frequency and force on the subject of sexual immorality. The war has increased the evil to an extent few people realise. A most alarming amount of venereal disease is spreading through the community. The subject is a difficult and delicate one, but surely it should not be beyond the power of a Christian Church to create a public opinion on the matter, and insist upon the Christian duty of purity of living. The attitude of the Churches on all these social questions must change. There is ample room for repentance, and it has already begun, though we in Ireland are slow to follow this good lead. The Inter-Denominational Conference of Social Service Unions has stated the case clearly. "We have the spectacle of a society which, despite the Christian piety and zeal of individuals and groups, is far from having been Christianised in its organised relationships. The Gospel of Christ is not recognised as the supreme law in politics, civil life, professional dealings, commerce, and industry. There are those who say that it could not be the supreme law in these matters; but we are convinced that nothing short of the Christianising of man in all his relations can succeed in solving our social problems and guiding to the highest purpose the manifold activities of man." Yet we have no Social Service Union in connection with our Church.

One of the most splendid and hopeful things which have been brought about by the war is the unstinted generosity and self-sacrifice, in both money and work, on behalf of the wounded, the bereaved, and the sailors and soldiers. But are we to be weary in well-doing as soon as the war is over? I know, and I am sure every one here present knows, of many who for the first time in their lives have experienced the pure joy of service. Better than golf or tennis, better than concerts or the theatre, is the happiness of being really useful to those who need help, and members of work parties, voluntary nurses and cooks, and others, have entered into the joy of their Lord. Be it remembered, "the poor we have always with us." The end of the war will not be the end of opportunity in this respect. There will always be

victims of industrial warfare; there will always be many who are severely handicapped in the battle of life. It will be an indelible stain upon our Churches if, as soon as peace is declared, we drop this truly Christian work and return to the old ways. In pre-war days, what was Church work generally? I once heard the question answered bluntly, but I am afraid truly, at a Unitarian meeting across the water. "Church work consists very largely in dunning other people to pay for our religion." We shall miss a glorious opportunity if we are satisfied with sales of work and cake fairs for church funds, and do not make an organised, sympathetic, and intelligently directed effort to minister to the wants of those less fortunately placed than ourselves. By our works we must show the world our faith.

There is yet another side of the opportunity which the present crisis offers us. Real faith is wrought out of experience, for even the faith of the fathers to which we may cling is the result of experience, and can only be really ours when we have had some experience which enables us to appreciate and accept it. Consider for a moment the tremendous experience through which we are now passing. A large proportion of the young manhood of many nations is experiencing modern warfare. What that means almost passes the power of words to express. Again and again, in letters from the front, we come across such phrases as "it is hell let loose," or "it is worse than hell." Such experiences cannot be borne without having an effect on faith. Leaving on one side the demoralising influences, and looking only for the good, what do we find? The soldiers hate the official church parades; they find it difficult to reconcile the horrors through which they have to pass with belief in a God of love. They do not profess to be religious; but as never before they know the meaning of comradeship, and they admire certain qualities and despise others. They admire courage, generosity, straightness, determination to do the right thing. They detest swank, cant, meanness, physical fear, narrow-mindedness, moral cowardice. What they so often fail to realise is that their ideal is strangely like the ideal of the Gospels. The fault is not theirs; it rests with the Churches which have presented the Gospel message in archaic phraseology, and not in terms of present day experience. Almost exactly a year ago there appeared in the "Westminster Gazette" an article by Sir Harry Johnston on "The People and the Church," in which he maintained that the reason why people stay away from church is a reason "which no professional clergyman or pastor will admit—that much of the traditions, teachings, and precepts of the Christian Church are entirely out of date." The truth of this we must, I think, admit, yet we of the Non-Subscribing Church have no need to labour under these disadvantages. We are bound to no dead creeds; we are under no obligation to uphold a theology fashioned in the middle ages; we are not wedded to worn-out phrases. There is an apocraphal saying attributed to Jesus which goes to the root of the matter: "Show yourselves approved money-changers." Money to be of use in business must be current coin. The coins of the ancient Roman Empire are only of use for a museum. Jesus was himself the best example of his own precept. He taught with authority, and not as the scribes; he changed into current coin whate'er of truth the old time had; he used not the language of ancient scriptures, but drew his illustrations from the common experiences of his hearers—the wedding feast, the market place, the play of little children, the work of the farmer. And the narrow-minded religious people of his day called him a blasphemer. Even at the risk of sharing the same fate, we must guard against being not only archaic but also technical, and find the foundations on which to build a living faith in the experiences of those we wish to influence, and the expression of it in the current coin of common speech. Not only the soldiers and sailors who experience actual warfare, but all who suffer bereavement, all

who have to endure constant anxiety, and even all who feel that issues of vital importance for mankind are at stake, are passing through experiences which will make or unmake faith. What a grand opportunity for our Church to interpret these things, to set forth in intelligible language the revelation of eternal truth these stirring events must contain. Not in an arrogant spirit which claims a monopoly of truth, but equally certainly not in a timid and apologetic temper, let us rise to our opportunities and our obligations. In that remarkable book, "A Student in Arms," there is a chapter entitled "An Englishman Philosophizes." It records the experiences of a soldier at the front who is forced to think out the meaning of what is happening around him. This is the end of the matter:—"In the intervals of presenting arms and acting as orderly-corporal, the average Englishman thought over his experiences, and it suddenly struck him that during his fortnight as a section commander he had actually forgotten to be afraid, or even nervous. It was really astonishing. Moreover, his mind rose to the occasion, and pointed out the reason. He had been so anxious for his section that he never once thought of himself! With a feeling of utter astonishment he realised that he had stumbled upon the very roots of courage—unselfishness. He, the average Englishman, had made an epoch-making philosophical discovery. Of course he did not know that the Buddha had discovered this great truth some thousands of years before him. Still less did he guess that the solution of all these problems with which war had confronted him was contained in the religion in which he was supposed to have been educated—that trust in the all-knowing Father was Christ's loftier substitute for submission to fate; that faith was the higher form of self-confidence; and that the love that Christ taught was the Buddha's selflessness without the incubus of his artificial philosophy. Nevertheless, he had made great strides, and war has still fresh experiences in store for him; and no doubt experience will continue to instruct. After all, how seldom does a Christian education teach one anything worth knowing about religion."

Here, then, is another part of our opportunity—so to mend our ways that this last taunt may be no longer true; to give articulation to the faith which the experiences of these times should reveal; while not professing to justify the ways of God to man in their entirety, to give grounds for hope and reasons for faith, and to inspire earnest effort for the kingdom of God on earth. Many years ago Mr. H. G. Wells suggested an Order of Voluntary Nobility to undertake the reformation and government of the world. That is what the Church should be; her members should not only profess, but also feel, and do far more for God and humanity than those who have not the benefit of her living faith. To us still comes the challenge, "What do ye more than others?"

> Charge once more then and be dumb!
> Let the victors when they come,
> When the forts of folly fall,
> Find thy body by the wall.

LESSON NOTES FOR TEACHERS.

To be used in accordance with the scheme of Bible instruction for 1917 prepared by the Sunday School Committee of the N.S.P.C.I.

August 5th. An incident by the way. Read Luke xix. 1-10. Key text, Luke xix. 10.

General Note.—Luke alone narrates this incident. As is usually the case with all the stories that are peculiar to Luke, it breathes a spirit of broad and tender humanity.

1. *Zacchæus.* He was a publican. This has nothing to do with keeping a public-house. "Publicans" in the New Testament are public officials, tax gatherers in the employment of the Roman Empire. As the strictest Jews were filled with the desire for national independence, they had no love for the Roman Empire, and regarded all its officials as outcasts. Many, how-

ever, were willing to be outcasts, because, generally, tax collecting was an easy way to great riches. But the fame of Jesus as the bringer of new light and hope to all had reached the ears of this rich little publican, and he felt an overwhelming desire to see him.

2. *The Sycamore Tree.* Unlike many folk, not only of those, but also of our, times, who are willing enough to receive new light if it means no trouble, Zacchæus perched himself in a sycamore tree, probably endured hours of waiting in order to see the great teacher from Galilee.

3. *Jesus looked up.* He was unexpectedly rewarded. He not only saw Jesus, but Jesus saw him. "God helps them who help themselves." He who seeks for goodness is helped by goodness coming to him. The main thing is to have faith and resolution enough to make an effort. Zacchæus little realized that his conspicuous, though uncomfortable and scarcely dignified, position, would mark him out to Jesus as one who truly desired light. At once our Lord's divine heart prompted him to do the right thing. He, a prophet, invited himself to the house of the rich publican, despised of all strict Jews.

4. *The result.* Whilst the bigots outside murmured because Jesus had actually entered the house of a sinner, inside the sinner was so completely converted by the loving sociability of his guest, that he made a great renunciation. Half his goods he would give to the poor, and of the remainder he would give fourfold to all he had wronged. This shows what love and courtesy could do, whilst bigotry and contempt could do nothing. To Jesus Zacchæus was just as much a brother ("a son of Abraham") as his most devoted followers. Besides, he was the very sort of man our Lord came to help. He came "to seek and to save that which was lost." Far more good will be done if we treat those who are despised and hated, with friendliness, than if we turn up our noses at them. The proof of our Christianity is the way we show God's love to all men by our own loving kindness. Many a so-called "bad man" has been won to goodness by a good man treating him just as if he were a brother.

Aug. 12th. The entry into Jerusalem. Read Mark xi. 1-18. Key text, Mark xi. 9.

1. "*The Lord hath need of him.*" We must remember that this was the most significant moment in the life of Jesus. He was about to enter the great and powerful city of Jerusalem in order to win the people to his side as the Messiah of a new and eternal kingdom. What a fuss some folk would have made They would have needed all sorts of! wonderful clothes and decorations, brass bands, and I know not what, in order to make what they would feel to be a fitting entrance. The *one* thing our Lord said he needed was a humble colt. Why? Because no man is fit for the kingdom, is worthy to be called a child of God, unless he is willing to humble himself, trusting rather in God's strength than man's. He needed only the lowliest help; he depended on the appeal of humility rather than on making what we may call a great splash. If only we would go the same way to work, we should soon have a Christian world. Instead of feeling that in order to make a proper entrance among folk, we needed to make money, or put on fine clothes and grand airs, we could feel that the one necessary thing was a tender and loving heart that was ready to perform even the lowliest service so that it was helpful, we should soon convince them that the kingdom of God was at hand.

2. "*Hosanna.*" Our Lord's humble entrance appealed to what was best in man's nature, and he was rapturously greeted as the Messiah. The cutting down of the palm branches to strew in his way, gives its name to Palm Sunday. Whether the multitudes really knew it or not, they could not have described Jesus' purpose better than when they cried, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord," for Jesus did not come in order to gain some earthly advantage for himself, or merely to enrich his followers. He came to try to turn men's hearts to God, so that God's kingdom might be

established. Oftentimes he who most truly comes in the name of the Lord is misunderstood and rejected, as within a few days Jesus was. It is for us to be always ready to welcome even the humblest and most arduous opportunities of showing our love to God. To every one who prompts us to better things we should cry, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

3. *The fig tree.* This apparently difficult incident is explained thus by commentators: "A fig tree in *leaf*, unless its appearance was a deception, should have *fruit* on it—green fruit, at least. But this tree had nothing but leaves. It belied its profession, and this was its condemnation." In the same way it is no use our making a good show, either in position, clothes, wealth, or education, unless we bear some good fruit.

4. *The plotting against Jesus.* He especially offended the priests, because in righteous indignation he had actively protested against business and trading inside the temple. He knew how unsafe he was, because, as we learn from v. 19, "every evening he went forth out of the city." His time was not yet come, and until then he spent the nights with friends outside.

Aug. 19th. The Parable of the Vineyard. Read Mark xii. 1-12. Key text, Mark xii. 10.

General Note. In this parable the vineyard is the earth; the husbandmen are the dwellers upon earth. We are not responsible for the fruitfulness of the earth. That is God's generous gift to us. Our powers are limited to cultivating the earth and developing all its wealth. God, however, expects the fruits of the earth to come back to Him. This does not mean that there is nothing for us. The fruits that God requires are not the food, etc., necessary for maintaining life, but the noble, willing, and purified hearts of all mankind. We really own nothing by right. He who just takes everything for his own selfish enjoyment, making no return of piety, generosity, and love, is most dishonest. We must regard ourselves as God's stewards, working in *His* vineyard (not our own), and making a return of noble living for the wages he pays us in the shape of earthly food and comfort.

1. *He sent a servant.* These servants are the prophets, who came to call men to a better and more unselfish life, and thus return to God worthy fruits of the vineyard. But by refusing to heed the prophets, even shamefully ill-treating and killing them, they denied their proper debt to God.

2. *"They will reverence my son."* The strength of God's love for men is shown by the constant efforts He makes to win them to Him. He even sent of His very best, hoping thus to win them to a proper state of mind. But the son fared worst of all. The Son is Jesus Christ, the greatest and best messenger ever sent to men, and in this parable our Lord is shown as foretelling his own fate.

3. *The fate of the husbandmen.* They will lose everything. Above all they will lose the great opportunity of doing God's work, and thus all the earthly treasure they have laid up will count for nothing. Those who do not make good use of the treasures God gives, fail to be His children, and lose their place in the eternal kingdom.

4. *"The stone which the builders rejected."* This saying shows that one reason why men did not heed Jesus was because he appeared "in humblest guise." But this humble carpenter was to be the chief corner stone in the heavenly kingdom of loving souls.

5. *They feared the multitude.* At this stage the great mass of the people were still loyal to Jesus; but his enemies cunningly spread false reports, etc., until, as we shall see, the people at last turned against him.

Aug. 26th. Love and Envy. Read Mark xiv. 1-11. Key text, 1. John iv. 16.

1. *Plots against Jesus.* His enemies did not want to act during the great Passover Feast, because there would be crowds of folk present in Jerusalem from Galilee, who would be supporters of Jesus. But the action of Judas made them seize him earlier than they intended.

2. *Love and Envy.* At first sight the

arguments of those who disapproved of the woman's generous act of devotion seem to contain something of love. They said that the three hundred pence (worth about £40 of our money), which the ointment cost could have been given to the poor. But the point is, that they did not say this because they loved the poor, but because they were envious at such generous devotion being shown to the humble Jesus of Nazareth. Love alone gives value to our deeds. Many folk do what is right from a wrong motive, and then expect to be thought righteous. A halfpenny given in love is a nobler gift than £1,000 given merely to make a show, or even to spite someone else. Jesus' enemies would have given the 300 pence to the poor, not from love for them, but to spite Jesus and keep him from being honoured. Whereas the woman never stopped to think how much the ointment cost. It was the best she could get, because she really loved Jesus; and we always want to give the best we can to those we really love. If we really loved God and goodness, we should never think about any trouble or expense entailed in doing His will. We should just do it, no matter how great the cost, no matter how great the sacrifice.

3. *Verse* 3. "*A woman.*" According to Luke, this woman was a "*sinful woman.*" If so, how much greater the discredit for Jesus' enemies, who prided themselves on being "righteous," and yet were full of the sin of envy.

4. "*Ye have the poor always with you.*" The meaning of this is quite simple. The woman had only this one opportunity of performing a gracious act of service for Jesus, and she was wise in making the most of it. Whereas, if those murmurers really cared for the poor, there was ample opportunity of doing something for them when Jesus was gone. The point is, always do good when you can; never excuse yourself for not doing the good you can on the ground that you might be able to do a greater good some other time.

For elder scholars.—Some folk, usually to serve their own ends, have employed the words, "Ye have the poor always with you" as meaning that Jesus approved of there always being a class of poverty-stricken people in the world, and therefore they have never attempted to tackle the problem of poverty. As if Jesus could have approved of the continual existence of poverty, when the essence of his teaching is helpfulness. Whether we succeed or not, we are bound to try to help those who are worse off than ourselves, and eventually to do away with poverty.

E. H. P.

Reports.

Unity Guild.—The June outing took place on Saturday, the 23rd June, and its destination was Holywood. Although the day turned out unpropitious, the outing was very enjoyably spent, and, contrary to expectations, the muster of members was good. The Rev. G. L. Phelps and Mr. Hugh Erskine welcomed the party on its arrival, and after a brief visit and "council of war" at the school-room, led the way along the shore to Marino, and from thence up the hill-side via the Croft Road and back again to the school-room, where the Guild was hospitably entertained to tea. Happily the rain kept off sufficiently long after tea to enable members to visit the garden plots, and admire the flowers and shrubs and finely-kept garden at "Duncairn." Then the heavens opened its flood-gates, and deluged the land. Someone suggested that if we had been blessed with Mr. E. R. Jackson's presence instead of his thoughtfully-sent apology for absence, the rain might have been stayed, and our happy trip to Holywood ended gracefully instead of in a scamper to the station. The next outing takes place on 8th of September, and is destined for Moira.

Comber.—A very successful Flower Service in connection with the Sunday School Anniversary was held on Sunday, 22nd July, when seventy young people from the Sunday School and Bible Class presented flowers. The congregation numbered over two hundred, and the collection, which was in aid

of the funds of the Sunday School, amounted to twelve guineas. The flowers were subsequently despatched to the Children's Hospital, Queen Street, Belfast.

* *

Mountpottinger.—The Annual Floral Services took place on Sunday, June 24th, and were eminently successful. In the afternoon a fine contingent of scholars and teachers came from All Souls' Church, including the minister, and the First Church, Rosemary Street, was represented by its minister and many members. The church was florally decorated by Miss Davidson and other ladies of the congregation, and rarely has the work been accomplished with more tasteful results. The Rev. W. H. Townley Tilson, of Greyabbey, was the special preacher, and his services gave universal satisfaction. Unlike last year, the Sunday School outing, which took place at Moneyrea, on July 7th, was favoured with glorious weather. The grounds which Mr. S. M'Kenna Turkington placed at the disposal of the Sunday School were a haunt after each boy and girl's heart, and the scholars revelled the live-long day in the games and swings. At a recent meeting of the congregation it was resolved to adopt the New Hymnal.

(*A number of Reports held over.*)

MARRIAGE.

KING—BROWN—On June 2nd, 1917, at the Unitarian Church, Portland, Oregon, U.S.A., by the Rev. W. G. Eliot, M.A., Janie Marshall, eldest daughter of the Rev. R. Maxwell King, Newtownards, to Mr. Howell Vivian Brown, Carson, Washington.

DEATHS.

HASTINGS—At Ballyhalbert, Co. Down, on July 10th, Agnes Hastings, aged 79 years. Interred July 12th, 1917.

M'ALISTER—July 18th, at Millbank, Roughfort, Joseph Williams, son of the late William P. M'Alister, Craigarogan. Interred in the Old Burying-ground, Templepatrick.

THOMAS—On July 6th, at 57 High Street, Manchester, S.E., the Rev. E. L. H. Thomas, B.A., minister of Cross Street Chapel, Manchester.

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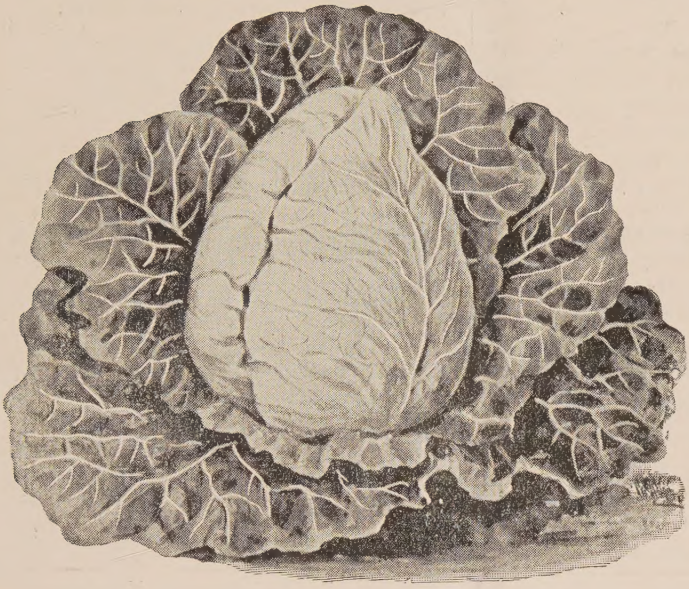

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